

WEEK 2: TRAINING CONCEPTS



HOW CONSEQUENCES CONTROL BEHAVIOR

Learning to think like a dog!

Dogs learn from a simple “cause and effect” concept. If something they do results in a good outcome, it will be repeated, if it’s unpleasant or their behavior results in no outcome, it will decrease to baseline.

THE DOG'S INPUT IS IMPORTANT

Sometimes we assume what we're doing is rewarding, or is punishing, but the dog may just interpret it differently.

Example 1: We may *think* our dog is going to love a treat we got them, but for whatever reason, they may find it vile. If they don't like it, shoving it in their mouth over and over again is actually quite punishing!

Example 2: We may *think* pushing our dogs down off of us when they jump up, but if the dog was seeking contact, that touch may actually be rewarding.

You have to evaluate if the behavior is going up, being maintained or going down in frequency to determine if what we're doing is reinforcing or punishing.

OUR JOB RIGHT NOW IS TO PAY THE HECK OUT OF BEHAVIORS

Since you're in training class to build new skills, it's important to be clear that you're going to be paying the heck out of your dogs right now. Each treat means the behavior gets stronger. So pay every desirable behavior right now. It's going to feel like a lot. It is a lot! But like we talked about last week, make a trail mix using some of your dog's food for this!

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CREATING HOUSEHOLD STANDARDS

The key to successful dog training is consistency.

Before you begin, you will want to sit down with all parties involved in training your pet and make some decisions. Will the dog always walk on the left, or will the dog always walk on the right? Is the dog allowed on the furniture, or is the sofa off limits? Decide what the rules are and stick to them. If these rules aren't clear to you, they certainly won't be clear to the dog, so take some time to discuss as a family and then be consistent in your message to the dog.

LACK OF GENERALIZATION

Generalization refers to the ability of applying a concept from context to context. Dogs don't generalize behaviors well, they're actually awful at it! This will be important to keep in mind throughout your training because if you only train in your living room, you will likely only get strong responses in your living room. Move to a bedroom and all bets are off!

This is hard for us enlightened humans to grasp because this comes so easy to us, and so we think to ourselves, "Well, fidos KNOWS this!" because we've seen him perform well in other places. But keep in mind that it's likely he doesn't actually know if you are in a new and challenging environment, or the environment has shifted drastically. He's not being stubborn, he needs your help to understand.

TIMING AIDS & TIMING

We use timing aids known as markers in training. Some use a clicker, some use a verbal marker such as "Yes!" These timing aids not only help us to pinpoint for the dog which behavior we'd like them to repeat, they also serve as our contract with the dog. When you hear this marker, you get a treat. Timing is important. Be sure to mark WHILE the behavior you want them to repeat is occurring.

ONE CLICK = ONE TREAT. ALWAYS.

Every time you mark a behavior, either with the clicker, or with a verbal marker, you pay your dog. Don't break promises, it erodes trust.